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FRENCH WRITER FAVORABLY IMPRESSED WITH THE USSR

Le Courrier Picard
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[Comment: Following is a summary of an article published in three issues of Le Courrier Picard, Amiens daily newspaper, by Victor Caumartin, doctor of science and professor at the Ecole Normale d'Amiens (Amiens Normal School). The article covers Caumartin's impressions of a one-month trip through several countries in the Soviet bloc. The group with which Caumartin traveled was composed of 15 French nationals, representing such fields as pedagogy, industry, journalism, labor, etc., and was expressly arranged and supervised by VOKS (All-Union Society for Cultural Relations With Foreign Countries).]

Data on Agriculture, Prices, Transportation

In Siberia, several kolkhozes were visited including some where apples, pears, cherries, and plums are grown during the short season of 100 days. Also seen was one type of wheat, which yields 25 quintals to the hectare. Furthermore, a number of vegetable grafting experiments are being carried out on the kolkhozes visited. For example, tomatoes are grown on potato plants, and tobacco is grown on stocks of tomato plants.

Leghorn chickens in this region are fed a mash of pine needles soaked in warm water and finely chopped. This diet is economical and is also rich in vitamins. These chickens lay between 120 and 170 eggs in an 8-month period.

In the matter of fertilizers, the Soviets lag behind the West. Generally, their wheat produces from 19 to 25 quintals per hectare.

In Armenia, the government is planting a good milling wheat, which yields 10-12 quintals per hectare at altitudes up to 2,500 meters.

Workers on the kolkhozes are paid partly in cash and partly in foodstuffs. The average salary is 450 rubles per month. A typical family of five receives 8,000 rubles, 2.7 tons of wheat, 1,400 kilograms of rye, 1,400 kilograms of barley, 3 tons of vegetables, and 60 kilograms of meat in one year. In addition, the family receives 80 kilograms of pork and 1,500 kilograms of milk as a bonus.

Bread and meat are usually purchased at the state markets, while fruits and vegetables are obtained on the free market. Taxes are relatively light. On a farm producing 18 quintals per hectare, the tax would be 2 quintals per hectare.

Typical prices a farm worker pays out of his 450 rubles per month are as follows: bakery products, one ruble per kilogram; delicatessen products, 15-20 rubles per kilogram; preserves, 20 rubles per kilogram; shoes, 44-85 rubles per pair; socks, 7-9 rubles per pair; toilet soap, 1.90 rubles per bar; wine, 10-20 rubles per liter; and Armenian cigarettes, 8 rubles per pack.

White bread is available, although the people seem to prefer rye bread, which sells at 1.5-3 rubles per kilogram. It seems to be the policy of the Soviet regime to permit, from time to time, certain luxury articles to appear on the market at prices within the reach of the average worker. An instance of this was the appearance in Moscow recently of television receivers at 1,500 rubles, the approximate monthly salary of a skilled worker. Electric razors cost 50 rubles

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each. Another luxury currently on the market is a small car, the Moskvich, which sells for 9,000 rubles. Although a daily production of 800 cars would be required to keep pace with current demands, only 110 cars are manufactured per day. Other factories are now being established to increase production.

For long-distance travel, the most popular transportation is by air. Most of the aircraft in use are two-engine planes, which are quite comfortable, although not luxurious. The fare per kilometer is more or less the same as on the railroads, and now, the Soviet people use air travel about as freely as people use railroads in France. This is largely because railroads in the USSR are quite poor and are often delayed by bad weather.

Social Advances

Family allowances in the USSR are somewhat as follows: with the birth of the fourth child, the family receives a bonus of 650 rubles, plus a monthly allotment of 40 rubles, until the child reaches the age of 12. For the fifth child, the above allotments are increased to 850 and 50 rubles, respectively. For the seventh child, they are 1,000 and 70 rubles, respectively. Beginning with the tenth child, the allotment goes up to 2,500 and 150 rubles, respectively.

Contrary to the picture evoked by the Stakhanovites, overtime is permitted in the USSR only by consent of the central committee of the factory. No worker may put in more than 2 hours overtime in any day, no more than 2 consecutive days of overtime, and no more than 100 hours of overtime per year. Furthermore, the wages received by the three classes of workers (unskilled, 900 monthly; skilled, 1,500 monthly; and technical, 2,000-3,000 monthly) are adequate without recourse to extra income.

Rentals for lodgings are usually based on the salary of the individual (4-6 percent of the salary). Thus, two workers with a wide difference in wage scales might pay quite different rentals for the same type of apartment.

A student accepted for admission to a university receives a monthly allotment of 760 rubles (equivalent to the wage of a manual laborer), from which he pays 15 rubles a month for his room and 3 rubles [weekly?] for meals. Given such favorable conditions, the number of students is fairly large. Professors and instructors, on the other hand, are required to give only 18 hours of instruction per week.

As far as entertainment is concerned, in Moscow, a 3-D film was shown at which the spectators did not need glasses to view it.

No evidence of preparations for war was noted. Cameras were permitted to be carried at all times and no restrictions were placed on photographic subject matter. The films were developed by the Soviets, but in every case, they were returned intact to the owners.

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